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Pocket Field Guide - Landscaping for Wildlife: Mammal Identification



Landscaping for Wildlife

If you enjoy observing nature, you will probably want to attract more wildlife to your property. The term 'wildlife' means different things to different people. To someone who feeds birds, it may mean cardinals, chickadees, finches, and hummingbirds. To a bird watcher, it may mean rare species. To a gardener, it may mean butterflies and bees.

To a wildlife biologist, the term wildlife means all living organisms that are out of the direct control of humans. This definition should also include the habitat of the species—how can you attract more wildlife to your yard if you do not provide a healthy habitat for the species? A habitat includes food, water, cover, and space for wildlife to raise their offspring. If you keep these elements in mind while creating your native garden/wildlife habitat plan, your chances for success are excellent.

Food requirements vary for each species. It changes as they age, and from one season to another. For some species, the berries in your garden are ideal. For others, it may be the nuts, grasses, grains, seeds, or nectar in flowers. To more adequately plan for specific species of birds, (for example), it is advisable to study the habits and desires of the individual species.

Water is as important as food, and is critical for survival of all wildlife. Adding a pond, a bird bath, or a small watering area will produce results in a hurry. Be sure to provide a branch or a means for smaller birds and animals to reach the water without falling in and drowning. Also, be sure to keep the water area filled with clean water during the dry summer months. Paying attention to small details can have big payoffs for the nature lover.



Even an apartment/condo dweller can have a small pond to provide fresh water for wildlife. As a homeowner, this can be buried to the full depth of the pond. With the addition of a small branch or bunch of twigs, even the smallest animals may get a drink.

Cover is important for weather protection as well as protection from predators. It is also necessary for procreation and resting.

	
Little Brown Bat	Northern Myotis Bat
	
Rafineque Big-eared Bat	Seminole Bat
	
Silver-haired Bat	Southeastern Myotis Bat
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Virginia Big-eared Bat	

Kentucky's Bats

	
Big Brown Bat	Eastern Pipistrelle Bat
	
Eastern Red Bat	Eastern Small-footed Myotis Bat
	
Evening Bat	Gray Myotis Bat
	
Hoary Bat	Indiana Bat

Cover can be provided by shrubs, grasses, trees, (including dead trees), rock and brush piles, ground cover, tree trunks on the ground, nesting boxes, and specially built houses.

Space is needed for wildlife to raise their young. Most species establish territory and defend it. For example, bluebird nesting houses must be 300 feet apart or the bluebirds will fight each other. Wood ducks and purple martins do not defend territories. Loons prefer 100 acres of lake or wetlands, and the ruffed grouse needs 10 acres. Diverse species can share habitat, but most require adequate space to raise their young.



By eating about 1000 mosquitoes an hour, bats have become welcome visitors to the backyard habitat. Many bat houses are available for purchase or may be easily constructed. Providing a home, as well as water, space and cover, can increase the chances that a friendly pest-eating bat will take up residence nearby and offer effective, free, environmentally friendly pest control for your yard. Houses that can accommodate small colonies are also available.

Within a natural ecosystem, plants grow in different vertical layers. This is important because some wildlife species may use the ground layer for food, but also need the tree canopy for shelter. The middle layer is composed of shrubs. If you follow nature's lead by planting in layers throughout your yard, this will allow for different feeding and nesting habits or many species. While it is not necessary, (or particularly desirable for a family with children), to give up entirely on a lawn, limiting its size will not only benefit wildlife, it will also save you time, money, and energy. Mowing, weeding, and watering are all costly, both in terms of what you pay for them and the number of hours you spend doing them.

If there is a single rule to follow in attracting wildlife, it is to make your landscape as diverse as possible, with many different plant species. Not only can you choose plants that specifically

attract the types of wildlife that you would enjoy the most, but if a plant does not work in your garden plan, you can easily plant something else.

Try to plan your garden so that it blends well into the surrounding area, making a gradual change from a native planting to a separate area with no sharp or distinct difference. Plant a variety of shrubs, flowers, and trees that bloom or bear fruit at different times of the year, to provide a yearly supply of foodstuffs. Don't cut down plants that have died back in the fall, because often these plants provide seed for different wildlife forms, especially birds, throughout the winter. Lastly, by offering many kinds of native plants, you are ensuring that a wide variety of wildlife can thrive.

Create a Certified Wildlife Habitat





The Nation Wildlife Federation can certify your Native Plant Garden as a Habitat for Wildlife, if you wish, and if you meet their criteria for habitat creation. More information about this certification program may be found at

<http://www.nwf.org/backyard/>.

Certification of your Native Plant Garden as a Wildlife Habitat can help your neighbors accept the use of native plants in gardens, and the use of innovative designs and non-traditional lawns. Your gardening enthusiasm can really make a difference to your neighborhood's environment, making it a better place for everyone to live, with better property values.



As a word of caution, if you have neighbors that will actively pursue eradication of the wildlife you are trying to protect and nurture, it may be better to avoid attracting the kinds of wildlife that they do not wish to be on their property. Everyone has

	
Least Weasel	Long-tailed Weasel
	
Gray Wolf	Red Wolf

Despite their ecological value, bats are relentlessly and unjustifiably persecuted. Bats are often killed because they live near people who needlessly fear them. These actions emphasize the need to educate the public on the reasons for bat conservation and why it is important to use safe, nondestructive methods to alleviate conflicts between people and bats. Except where control is necessary, bats should be appreciated from a distance — and not disturbed. Before you exercise even non-chemical controls for bats, you should you ask yourself, “Is this a real potential health problem, or am I just afraid of bats?”

Bats, the only mammals that truly fly, belong to the order *Chiroptera*, and are not flying rodents. Their ability to fly, their secretiveness, and their nocturnal habits have contributed to bat folklore, superstition, and fear. Among the many species of bats found in KY, only a few cause problems for humans, (note that vampire bats are not found in the United States and Canada). Bats congregating in groups are called colonial bats; those that live a lone existence are known as solitary bats.

	
Southern Flying Squirrel	Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel
	
Eastern Spotted Skunk	Striped Skunk
	
Kentucky Red-backed Vole	Meadow Vole
	
Prairie Vole	Woodland Vole

differing opinions about what kinds of plants and animals constitute 'pests'. To an environmentalist, all native flora and fauna have value within their ecological niche. Talking with your neighbors in an open, friendly way, and explaining your goals will go a long way toward mutual cooperation and understanding, and help you to meet the goals of your project.

A Successful Wildlife Habitat

In addition to providing the basics listed above, it is important to take some steps to prevent wildlife from becoming a nuisance, either to you, the homeowner, or to your neighbors.

Wild animals do best on their own, with minimal interaction with humans. Don't feed or set out food for wild, or domestic animals. You can attract a normal population of wild animals by planting native ornamental plants in your lawn and garden, but actually 'feeding' wild animals is not a good idea. What if you move and the animal is used to having a food source? The population of the wildlife will increase over the normal ecological balance, and the animals will become dependent upon the food you supply. Remember that in areas of the country with large cats, attracting deer will also attract their hunters.

Feed your pets inside your home. Don't feed pets outside on a deck, or near your house. Pet food attracts wild animals like raccoons, possums, and bears. It's important they don't learn to see your home as a source for food.



Possums may eat pet food, if left outside.

Secure your garbage cans. Get a can with a snap-on lid. If possible, store your can inside, in a garage, shed, or wooden garbage-can enclosure.




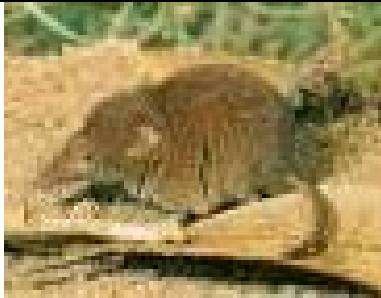
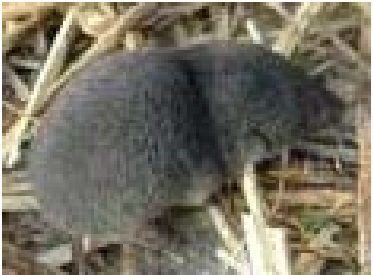

Screen your roof and crawlspace vents and cap your chimney, to prevent animals from seeking shelter in or under your house.



Enjoy wildlife from a distance! Don't get too close to a wild animal.









The listing of mammals below was taken from the Kentucky Wildlife Species listing, developed by the KY Department of Fish and Wildlife. It is not a complete list of all the kinds of wildlife that may be observed in your backyard, (and many species are very unlikely to be noticed in more urban areas), but it may help you to identify animals that are attracted to your wildlife habitat.









Pocket Field Guide to Kentucky's Backyard Wildlife
Mammals









	
Nine-banded Armadillo	American Badger
	
American Black Bear	Beaver
	
American Bison	Bobcat

	
Long-tailed Shrew	Northern Short-tailed Shrew
	
Pygmy Shrew	Smoky Shrew
	
Southeastern Shrew	Southern Short-tailed Shrew
	
Eastern Fox Squirrel	Eastern Gray Squirrel

	
Appalachian Cottontail	Eastern Cottontail Rabbit
	
Swamp Rabbit	Northern Raccoon
	
Hispid Cotton Rat	Marsh Rice Rat
	
Cinereus Shrew	Least Shrew

	
Eastern Chipmunk	Eastern Cougar
	
Coyote	White-tailed Deer
	
Grey Fox	Red Fox
	
Groundhog/Gopher/Woodchuck	Feral Hog

	
Southern Bog Lemming	American Mink
	
Eastern Mole	Hairy Tailed Mole
	
Star-nosed Mole	Cotton Mouse
	
Deer Mouse	Eastern Harvest Mouse

	
Golden Mouse	Meadow Jumping Mouse
	
White-footed Mouse	Woodland Jumping Mouse
	
Muskrat	Virginia Opossum
	
Northern River Otter	North American Porcupine